

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

I

In many areas of Eastern Africa the pressure of peasant populations on their tribal lands is a critical feature of the contemporary scene, and this is most especially so in the more fertile parts where the African has accepted the new cash economy and is beginning to appreciate the potentialities of the modern world. The situation has been highlighted recently in the public mind by the publication of the Report of the East African Royal Commission¹ which examined the economic conditions of our time and made general recommendations. 161 [197] [234]

In Tanganyika the overall density of population is low (22 persons per square mile) and the general scale of economic activity still remains little above subsistence level over vast areas of Territory. There are, however, islands of extremely dense populations scattered through the country, often associated with the mountain areas, where soil is fertile, rainfall is reliable and adequate and the cultivation of crops for sale in world markets has gone ahead fairly easily. These populations still comprise peasant farming communities with little capital and their "natural" impulse is to expand their extensive agricultural system rather than to intensify their cultivation on existing holdings. Serious overcrowding soon results for the favourable areas are limited and surrounded by drier bushlands. African attitudes and legal customs concerning their land do not change quickly and they lag behind new conditions of physical limitation and economic development. Whilst the recommendations of the Royal Commission may be valuable in the establishment of general policy, it is obvious that detailed application through time demands a fairly exact knowledge and understanding of particular local conditions if it is to be reasonably successful. This is particularly the case in so large a country as Tanganyika, with its multiplicity of environments and tribal systems of law, land tenure and agriculture, and the social attitudes which encompass them. [433] [241] 177

The present essay is an attempt, sponsored by Government, to describe and analyse the land and population conditions in one small area of the Territory where a cash economy is emerging and where the pressure of a peasant population on its land resources has become acute. It is hoped that some of this account may be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other similar areas both in Tanganyika and elsewhere, and that the conclusions reached may be helpful in dealing with the problems there; but primarily this is a study of one particular part of the country in order to provide the information upon which detailed policy may be founded. 121

The Nyakuyusa are not entirely typical of many of the Bantu people of East Africa for they have a most distinctive social organisation, peculiar to themselves, based on age-villages and petty, independent chiefdoms. Also, they inhabit a country whose annual rainfall is unusually high, averaging about 100 inches. On the other hand, these people are one of the very few in Tanganyika for whom we have an excellent account of both their pre-European and early European systems of land tenure. Based on this information, obtained *before* modern changes began, we can perceive, analyse 101 132 [174]

1. East African Royal Commission 1953-5, Report: H.M.S.O. 1955. Cmd. 9475.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955)1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

161 If therefore, pending the next Census to be made in 1957, we assume these rates of increase, then by 1955 it may be estimated that the Nyakyusa numbered about 217,000 at an average density of 233 persons per square mile, allowing 13.7 acres of land per family of five. For the Lake Plains alone, the population in 1955 would have been nearly 60,000 at an average density of 287 persons per square mile, with 11.2 acres per family. If we also include the estimated number of absentee migrant labourers in the base year of 1948, then there were in 1955 perhaps 63,000 people dependent on the land resources of the Lake Plains at an average density of 303 per square mile, though in fact some 6,000 men were temporarily absent from home in that year.

The figures and estimates are given in Table I. These averages do, of course, hide some considerable and significant local variations which are further described at pages 14 ff. below.

TABLE I
NYAKYUSA POPULATION

	1948 Census			1955 Estimates		
	a	b	c	a	b	c
Lake Plains at increase of 1% p.a.	55,700	268	11.9	59,700	287	11.2
Central Region at increase of 1% p.a.	48,500	224	14.2	53,800	248	12.9
N.E. Highlands at increase of 1% p.a.	40,300	183	17.4	44,700	203	15.8
N.W. Highlands at increase of 1% p.a.	53,200	185	17.3	59,000	205	15.6
NYAKYUSA in tribal area	197,700	212	15.2	217,200	233	13.7
a = population						
b = persons per square mile on land available for African use.						
c = average acreage available per family of 5 persons.						

Assuming that there were in 1948 about 3,000 men temporarily absent from their homes in the Lake Plains but who remained dependent on the land resources of that region, then the following estimate may be made:-

Lake Plains - persons resident at home and temporarily abroad:-

a	b	c	a	b	c
58,700	282	11.3	62,935	303	10.6

The approximate areas available for African use in the tribal lands (excluding alienated land, forest reserves and main roads) are:-

Lake Plains - 208 sq. miles	N.E. Highlands - 220 sq. miles
Central Region - 217 sq. miles	N.W. Highlands - 288 sq. miles
BuNyakyusa - 933 sq. miles	

In these calculations no account is taken of unusable land such as swamps, steep slopes, thicket, etc.

Cash Cropping: Paddy Cultivation

233
232
241
243
[141] This condition of a high density of population exists in a modern economy in which cash-cropping is universally accepted and desired. Under the former subsistence agriculture, because of heavy rainfall and natural annual flooding, quite small-sized holdings were adequate to satisfy a family's food requirements. Two harvests a year are easily obtained in some combination of maize, beans, groundnuts and finger millet, with a few small "luxury" crops; and the banana groves yield continuously. The Nyakyusa were and are extremely fortunate in their food supply, and seldom experience shortages such as occasionally or even commonly afflict many peoples of East Africa.

Rice was first introduced in 1896 by two chiefs who obtained the seed from Nyasaland Arabs; and in 1898 the Moravian Mission and a Swahili

trader brought in other seed. The trader himself planted a large plot and his success seems to have stimulated the Nyakyusa to follow suit. There was a slow but gradual development of planting and by 1932 it was estimated that some 500 tons of hand-hulled rice were sold. It had become clear that the alluvial flood plains around the northern tip of Lake Nyasa were ideally suited to paddy growing. Until 1942 the people continued to hand-hull their crop and sell the rice, but in that year they were persuaded to sell the paddy direct to a locally established mill. Following initial difficulties in milling, handling and marketing, the Government built a store capable of holding 14,000 bags and it also took over the whole of the marketing with a seconded District Officer in charge. In 1947 the cultivators formed their first co-operative society. This movement has been encouraged by Government and the local Co-operative Union now deals with storage and marketing with the guidance of a Government Co-operative Officer.

The figures of sales of rice and paddy are given in Table II.¹

Paddy has become a well-established crop, not only as the single cash crop of the region, but also as a food crop second only (or even equal) to the traditionally staple banana. About four-fifths of all arable holdings are paddy fields - though parts of these are used for dry season crops of maize, beans, etc. Virtually every Nyakyusa land-holder now grows paddy, and the vast majority regard it as their main crop. Cultivation is mainly by ox-plough followed by broadcast sowing and hand-weeding. Government efforts to encourage nurseries and planting out in rows have so far been entirely unsuccessful. Yields and perhaps quality too are thought to be lower than need be; the chief factor in production seems to be the degree of natural flooding during the wet season.

TABLE II
SALES OF RICE AND PADDY, 1932-56*

	tons		tons
1932 ..	500	1945 ..	1,200
1933 ..	600	1946 ..	2,700
1934 ..	600	1947 ..	3,300
1935 ..	600	1948 ..	2,100
1936 ..	700	1949 ..	3,700
1938 ..	700	1950 ..	2,300
1939 ..	1,200	1951 ..	1,200
1940 ..	1,500	1952 ..	2,000
1941 ..	1,600	1953 ..	5,700
1942 ..	2,200	1954 ..	5,900
1943 ..	2,800	1955 ..	3,700
1944 ..	2,900	1956 ..	3,000

*1932-41—hand-hulled rice, estimates only.

1942-47—paddy, sold through Government agency.

1948-56—paddy, sold through cultivators' co-operatives.

The cultivation of paddy requires relatively large-sized holdings due to the nature of the crop and the local extensive method of agriculture - for example, to produce a given income requires a far larger area of paddy in the Lake Plains than of coffee in the Northern Highlands of Nyakyusa country. As paddy cultivation became established, men increased their arable holdings in order to earn their money incomes. Larger holdings, rather than improved agricultural techniques, have become directly connected with higher incomes, and so the demand for more land set in. Assisted by the now general use of ploughs, paddy growing increased rapidly wherever it was found ecologically possible - i.e., within the alluvial flood plains and the coterminous area of annual natural flooding. Before this new demand for land emerged there were, even in the most highly populated parts, extensive areas which were more or

1. Information has been supplied by the Co-operative Officer, Tukuyu.

[P.238A]

- 241 Other foodstuffs grown are coca-yams, cow peas, pigeon peas, Bambarra groundnuts, ginger, cardamon, groundnuts, wheat, pumpkins, peppers, citrus, sugar cane and European vegetables, including a quantity of European potatoes.

[177]

Economic Crops

- 245 One of the main cash crops is coffee, which was introduced about 1900 by the Berlin Lutheran Mission, but it was not grown by natives until 1930 when an attempt was made to organize an industry. It had already been tried from 1924 onwards by Europeans but had gradually died out, giving place to tea.

[177]

- 245 Native coffee has not been truly successful and many reasons are suspected for this. In effect, the coffee suffers from many pests and diseases and yields are so low as to be almost uneconomical even to a tribe of very low individual annual income. It has become obvious that coffee can only be grown by natives if shaded by bananas and mulched heavily with banana trash. Multiple-stem pruning is gaining favour.

Seedlings are planted out in December and the first crop is obtained four years after. The area planted rose in 1939 to 5,864 acres and the number of native planters to 7,966. Yields, however, are low, varying from 131.4 kg. to 20.4 kg. parchment to the acre. Hemeleia leaf disease and yellow and white borer are prevalent all over the coffee-growing area. Over the period since 1932 the price paid to natives has averaged 44 cents a kg. for parchment.

[136]

- [438] All coffee is collected and sold by Native Authority after rough grading and, in order to encourage better preparation, much lower payments are made for the inferior grades. A native staff is employed to visit coffee plots and to give instructions, and it is noticeable that the quality of preparation varies with the price.

• [432]

- 175 The cultivation of rice on the lake shore was started by Chief Koroso in 1896 with seed obtained from Arab traders in Nyasaland and the Moravian Mission issued further seed in 1898. Being an innovation, rice was not popular and little was grown except for small local sales. In 1917 the Government issued seed and tax was paid in rice instead of money. Interest was hereby aroused and the cultivation of rice was started. In 1932 several other kinds of seed were issued and now sixteen varieties are found. "Faya", which was issued in 1929, gives the best yields and is the variety chiefly grown, other varieties being Bungala, Marula

243

[651]

243